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Suburban interests led by U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, and Melissa Bean, a Democrat from Barrington, rolled out a list of 10 principles and solicited input from top transportation leaders at the first meeting of the Suburban Transportation Commission.

The gist of the proceedings at the Lake County Division of Transportation headquarters in Libertyville was the suburbs are the population and job centers of the Chicago region and deserve special attention.

Greater representation on the Regional Transportation Authority, which oversees the budgets of the Chicago Transit Authority, the Metra commuter rail agency and Pace suburban bus system, was also one of principles supported by mayors in Kirk's 10th Congressional District. All were represented at the meeting.

"We want to make sure suburban priorities are given consideration across all transit agencies," Kirk said. He also emphasized solutions for the CTA's pension funding problems, "should not be at the expense of suburban commuters."

The session came as state legislators face a five-year, \$10 billion package of capital projects identified by the RTA as needed to improve transit systems. Metra's proposed 55-mile STAR line, for example, would meet suburb-to-suburb commuting needs, said Phil Pagano, executive director.

The RTA also said it needs \$400 million a year in new funding for operations.

Proposed legislation to restructure the authority also is in flux, though suburban interests are calling for greater representation on that board as well.

"What is surprising to us is now that we have plans in hand ready to go and (public) interest is high, we're told there is no money," McHenry County Board Chairman Ken Koehler testified to

the commission.

Koehler also said the RTA structure and funding formula needs to be changed.

Of the sales tax revenue generated for transportation in Cook and the collar counties, the CTA receives 58 percent, Metra, 31 percent, and Pace, 11 percent, according to Kirk.

RTA Chairman Jim Reilly said the five-year strategy, the first in 20 years, outlined in the \$10 billion request was approved by all the agencies and shows they can cooperate.

“That in itself is significant,” he said. It includes a bundle of projects that address needs such as suburb-to-suburb travel and reverse commuting that have arisen with the shift of population to the suburbs.

“We clearly have to think differently,” Reilly added.

He noted the CTA management and unions are “very much aware” of their financial problems and he doesn’t expect a separate bailout of its pension fund.

“I believe there need not be city versus suburbs versus collar counties. There are legitimate issues if we don’t come together on a program to fund transit ... all of the good things we’d like to accomplish together simply won’t be possible.”